

Using the World Wide Web to Facilitate the Editing and Publishing of a Textbook for Faculty Professional Development

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this report is to describe the editing and publication of a textbook to increase the opportunity for faculty to contribute textbook chapters, using the internet WWW to facilitate the editing process.

Methodology: An outline of 22 sections containing 214 chapters, was developed. Each section was assigned to an editor. Editors recruited authors for each of their section chapters. Chapters were submitted to the editors, then a chief editor completed the editing for the chapter.

Results: Chapters that were completed early, were posted on the WWW which permitted additional review by the authors facilitating communication with the editors. The additional lead time on the WWW permitted indexing and identification by internet search engines (e.g., Google), so that by the time the textbook was completed, most major search engines had already identified the on-line textbook. Page/type-setting was streamlined by the electronic transfer of the equivalent on-line chapter files to the publisher. 41 chapters were contributed by 18 senior faculty, 51 chapters were contributed by 29 assistant professors, 46 chapters were contributed by 23 non-faculty community physicians, 38 chapters were contributed by 27 residents, and 40 chapters were contributed by 37 medical students.

Conclusion: A textbook project such as this provides faculty with the opportunity to contribute to the medical literature enhancing their professional development. The WWW provides a new forum for publishing a textbook. It also provides a new communication option between editors and authors to better coordinate the content and editorial style of the chapters.

Introduction

Professional development includes teaching, research and academic writing. Opportunities to teach are readily available. Research requires training and initiative. The opportunity to write for a textbook is largely limited to academic leaders in a specialty. Yet the skill of scholarly writing is an important aspect of professional development¹.

The World Wide Web (WWW) is a new publishing option as well as a new option to facilitate communication between textbook editors and chapter authors.

The purpose of this report is to describe a method utilizing the WWW to facilitate the development of a textbook project to increase the opportunity for faculty to contribute textbook chapters. While some textbooks are developed and published to fulfill an informational resource need, a textbook project such as this has the purpose of providing an opportunity for scholarly writing thereby promoting faculty professional development.

Methodology

The department of pediatrics at this university affiliated medical center initiated a general pediatrics textbook project to give its faculty the opportunity to contribute chapters for the textbook. Highly motivated individuals were selected as editors. An outline of 22 sections containing a total of 214 chapters) was developed. Each section was assigned to one of the editors. Editors recruited authors for each of the chapters within their sections. Chapters were submitted to the editors, then a chief editor completed the editing for the chapter. Chapters were posted on a web site used to post the completed portions of the textbook and to facilitate the editing process. The central theme was to encourage faculty to contribute one or more chapters to the textbook.

Results

This project began in June 2001 and the final textbook was submitted for publication in October 2003. The editorial group initially consisted of one chief editor and five associate editors. During the early phase of the project, three editors relinquished their duties and they were replaced by two new editors who expressed the interest to do the work necessary to carry the project forward.

In the process of submitting their chapters to an editor, each author experienced the process of submitting written material to an editor for review, followed by cycles of editing and revision. It was evident that the authors possessed varying levels of skills in processes such as their ability to present written material in an organized fashion, their ability to write questions to

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check the reader's knowledge, and their ability to cite references properly.

During the project, chapters that were completed early, were posted on the internet World Wide Web (WWW). The web site title page described this as a textbook in development. This gave chapter authors a means of reviewing their own chapter and providing feedback between the editors to correct errors and to recommend changes in their chapter. This also gave internet search engines time to include the textbook's contents into their indexing data base, making it easier for search inquiries to locate the online textbook chapters once it was completed.

Page/type-setting was streamlined by the electronic transfer of the equivalent on-line chapter files to the publisher.

The final book contained approximately 650,000 words (including credits, table of contents and index), printed on 700 pages. Of the 214 chapters, 40 chapters were contributed by 17 senior faculty (associate professor or full professor), 48 chapters were contributed by 26 junior faculty (assistant professors), 46 chapters were contributed by 23 non-faculty physicians (most of these are private practice or military physicians who have medical school appointments but are not classified as regular faculty), 38 chapters were contributed by 27 residents, 40 chapters were contributed by 37 medical students, 1 chapter was contributed by a nurse practitioner, and 4 chapters were contributed by faculty physicians at other medical schools. Medical students and residents were given the opportunity to write some chapters under the direct supervision of the editors. Some chapters were written by two authors which accounts for the sum being greater than 214.

Finding a publisher was not difficult. "Vanity publishing" refers to the practice of paying a publisher to publish your book. Almost any book can be published via this means. By paying an up front fee to prepare the book for publication, most publishers can establish a print-on-demand arrangement, in which books are not printed until they are ordered. An ISBN (international standard book number) identifies all books, so that they can be catalogued by all bookstores. Although the book is not available on the shelf, a bookstore could still have it on catalog availability and they could order a single copy of the book if requested by a customer. Mail-order booksellers (Amazon.com, Borders.com, etc.) will display the book as if it is in their inventory and order it from the publisher if a customer orders the book.

Vanity publishing fees can range from \$300 to \$20,000 per book depending on the size of the book, the number of photographs/diagrams, and the publisher. The publisher we used, AuthorHouse (www.Authorhouse.com, Bloomington, IN) charged approximately \$700 to publish this book of approximately 700 pages in paperback form. To reduce the publishing cost, this textbook was written to contain text only. No photographs or diagrams are included in the textbook. The retail price of this 700 page book was \$18.75.

Discussion/Conclusion

The enthusiasm and energy level of the editors are important factors to complete a project such as this. It was disappointing to find that most authors were not very enthusiastic about contributing chapters. Several faculty members refused to participate. An opportunity to author a chapter in a textbook is an inviting opportunity. Yet many faculty members were not interested. It appears that in

these instances, the barrier to professional development is lack of self-motivation. The actual contribution to such a project identifies the future potential of junior faculty. If a junior faculty member has difficulty writing a chapter on a general medical topic, it is likely that this same faculty member will have difficulty with the more difficult task of generating original research. The problem could be lack of time, lack of self-motivation, or lack of the technical skills required for academic writing. In contrast, while some senior faculty might choose to contribute chapters to a textbook project, their lack of contribution should be interpreted differently since their professional goals might be higher than merely contributing to somebody else's textbook.

As with any group of authors, there are those who meet all deadlines, there are those who have to be reminded (once or more), and there are those who need to be replaced with another author. For this type of project to succeed, at least one of the editors must have effective management skills, be experienced in medical publishing, and be committed to completion of the project.

The method of posting the chapters on a web site as soon as the initial editing was done was very successful. This provided an added benefit of releasing the chapter to the WWW public domain many months before the actual publication of the textbook. The textbook chapters were identified by internet search engines before the book was completed. The table of contents on the web site had to be frequently updated to indicate which chapters were available. It also put some indirect pressure on some of the slower chapter authors who could see that most of the chapters were completed and available on the WWW, while their particular chapter was still not available.

Using the WWW to facilitate the editing process provides the editor with total control over the appearance of the chapter since the authors were not able to upload new versions of the chapter to the web site server. All changes had to go through the editor. This method permitted the authors to rapidly view their chapter after editing, reducing the turnaround time between cycles of editing. In a more traditional editing arrangement, the chapter might go back and forth between the author and editor. Each exchange represents an opportunity for the author to reinsert something that the editor had previously removed or modified (i.e., overcome editorial control). Editorial control is important as an oversight for the accuracy of information, the proper citation of potentially controversial statements, the maintenance of a balanced point of view in potentially controversial subjects, and to maintain a consistent style and appearance of the chapters so that each chapter possesses some similarity (such that they all belong in the same book).

The opportunity for scholarly writing is more available to senior faculty and less available to junior faculty. Pololi, et al, described a program directed at 18 assistant professors who participated in a writing and faculty development program which consisted of 7 monthly 75 minute sessions utilizing mentors¹. Other resource (including faculty time) expensive programs have also demonstrated success at improving aspects of faculty development, including scholarly writing². Ongoing faculty development and sound mentoring relationships facilitate the academic advancement of clinical faculty³. This textbook project provided mentoring through the editorial process,

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an actual experience in scholarly writing which is not ordinarily available to junior faculty, and a tangible academic achievement in completing a chapter (a successful endeavor), to promote faculty development utilizing fewer resources than other programs described in the literature. The use of the WWW greatly facilitated the editing process, reducing the amount of work for each editor. Secretarial support staff was not required for the editing process.

The WWW version of this book could stand alone as an electronic book. It is an electronic publication with no cost if one has access to a server and web site domain. Electronic journals and electronic books can be published and circulated through the WWW. The online documents can be continuously updated, as opposed to a paper book which requires an enormous effort and a substantial expense to publish a new edition. Despite the ubiquity and acceptance of electronic online reference materials, having a book in hand is an academic/professional accomplishment. The cost of on demand publishing has declined substantially, making both paper and electronic publishing more feasible for individuals and smaller department programs.

In conclusion, the WWW can be used to facilitate the editing process of organizing a textbook. It is also a new medium for academic publishing, which can be used to facilitate the professional and academic development of faculty.

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